

Configuring a Wireless Access Point

The physical setup for a wireless access point is pretty simple: You take it out of the box, put it on a shelf or on top of a bookcase near a network jack and a power outlet, plug in the power cable, and plug in the network cable.

The software configuration for an access point is a little more involved, but still not very complicated. It's usually done via a Web interface. To get to the configuration page for the access point, you need to know the access point's IP address. Then, you just type that address into the address bar of a browser from any computer on the network.

Multifunction access points usually provide DHCP and NAT services for the networks and double as the network's gateway router. As a result, they typically have a private IP address that's at the beginning of one of the Internet's private IP address ranges, such as 192.168.0.1 or 10.0.0.1. Consult the documentation that came with the access point to find out more.

Basic configuration options

When you access the configuration page of your wireless access point on the Internet, you have the following configuration options that are related to the wireless access point functions of the device. Although these options are specific to this particular device, most access points have similar configuration options.

- **Enable/Disable:** Enables or disables the device's wireless access point functions.
- **SSID:** The Service Set Identifier used to identify the network. Most access points have well-known defaults. You can talk yourself into thinking that your network is more secure by changing the SSID from the default to something more obscure, but in reality, that only protects you from first-grade hackers. By the time most hackers get into the second grade, they learn that even the most obscure SSID is easy to get around. So leave the SSID at the default and apply better security measures.
- **Allow broadcast SSID to associate?** Disables the access point's periodic broadcast of the SSID. Normally, the access point regularly broadcasts its SSID so that wireless devices that come within range can detect the network and join in. For a more secure network, you can disable this function. Then, a wireless client must already know the network's SSID in order to join the network.
- **Channel:** Lets you select one of 11 channels on which to broadcast. All the access points and computers in the wireless network should use the same channel. If you find that your network is frequently losing connections, try switching to another channel. You may be experiencing interference from a cordless phone or other wireless device operating on the same channel.
- **WEP — Mandatory or Disable:** Lets you use a security protocol called *wired equivalent privacy*.

DHCP configuration

You can configure most multifunction access points to operate as a DHCP server. For small networks, it's common for the access point to also be the DHCP server for the entire network. In that case, you need to configure the access point's DHCP server. To enable DHCP, you select the Enable option and then specify the other configuration options to use for the DHCP server.

Larger networks that have more demanding DHCP requirements are likely to have a separate DHCP server running on another computer. In that case, you can defer to the existing server by disabling the DHCP server in the access point.